

ARCOSANTI: AN ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE

A Professional Project  
Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Peter Michael Vaught  
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Peter Michael Vaught

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**DOCTOR OF MINISTRY**

### ***Faculty Committee***

John B. Cobb Jr.  
Steve F. Jackson

July 7, 1982  
Date

*Joseph C. Hough*  
Dean

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## ABSTRACT

It is not necessary to be an architect, ecologist or prophet to realize our cities are not working. It is not necessary to visit all the major cities of the world to realize in city after city the same errors of design have been made by decision or indecision. Our experience today is that of watching the heart and center of cities decay and die. The people of the cities spread out in what we have come to call urban sprawl.

Paolo Soleri has something to say in this regard. His vision of what a city can and must be is in sharp contrast to our experience of the city. The church has a call to proclaim a new solution to our urban problems. Presenting this man and his vision through the media of a videotape interview and a leader's guide is one way for the church to proclaim this vision of alternative lifestyle.

This project is an accurate and effective presentation of Paolo Soleri and his vision. The report of the presentation of the videotape interview and leader's guide indicated that the project does impact people at both an emotional and behavioral level. This videotape and guide will not solve the manifold urban problems or their related social problems, but I do believe that they could prompt people to think about these problems and discuss their possible solutions.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PURPOSE

### Statement of Purpose

The general purpose of this project is to make Paolo Soleri available to small groups within the local church through the use of a videotape interview. Today's world is faced with many crises, one of which is urban habitat. Paolo Soleri, an Italian-born architect, has developed an approach to the many problems faced by our cities. He has applied this approach, which he calls "arcology," to the building of a city in the central high desert of Arizona. "Arcology" is a contraction of the words architecture and ecology and conveys two of Soleri's major interests. First, it shows his concern that the architecture of our cities must be a humanizing influence. Second, it expresses his concern for ecology so that the planet on which we live can be capable of the continued support of a humanizing experience. Our cities have demonstrated little ability to solve major problems of safety, health, and quality of life. Arcosanti, the city being built and developed in congruence with Soleri's concepts, offers an alternate lifestyle.

In order to achieve the general purpose this project is designed to be accurate in its presentation of Paolo Soleri's concepts and effective in its ability to impact people on an emotional and behavioral level. Accuracy is stressed in the videotape interview by having Paolo Soleri simply answer questions concerning his concepts. I have

developed a leader's guide which is designed to broaden the viewer's understanding of the information presented by Soleri. If this project is to be effective, then it should also impact people on an emotional and behavioral level. It is for this reason that I have chosen the medium of the audiovisual interview. I hope that the audiovisual images of Arcosanti and Paolo Soleri will impact people at the emotional and behavioral level. The presentation process described in the leader's guide will facilitate this impact by its structured presentation and supplementary information.

I want this presentation of Soleri, through the media of a videotape interview and leader's guide, to be a resource which can be used by the church as a catalyst, stimulating reflection and discussion on the issues of our lifestyle. My hope is that this project will have that catalytic effect.

This videotape and accompanying leader's guide make Soleri available for study in small groups. They can alert persons to the crises of city life which are gathering ominously on the horizon, motivate them to discuss the feasibility of Soleri's alternate lifestyle as an urban reality, and lead them to consider the possibility of incorporating such an alternate lifestyle into the church's vision of the gospel. I do not believe that everything Soleri says is gospel or even compatible with the gospel, but I do believe

that he has some important observations about the state of the city. I believe, also, that he has a vision of what the city can be. He sees that a different type of city can result in a more humane existence. As I hear the challenge of the gospel, it is to pursue ways of loving our brothers and sisters. That challenge is echoed by Soleri's vision. This presentation is not intended as a demonstration of the finality of Soleri's thought or the truth of his concepts. It is designed to present his vision of an alternate lifestyle for thoughtful consideration of small discussion groups. In order to accomplish this purpose I have written Chapter II to show the process by which the videotape presentation developed. Chapter III functions as a leader's guide. It is designed to supplement knowledge of Paolo Soleri and his concept, and it suggests a process which should be used to augment the presentation of the videotape interview. I have reported the presentation of this videotape and leader's guide in Chapter IV recognizing both the strength and weakness of the presentation. Chapter V is a concluding statement which affords me the opportunity to state briefly my perceptions of how fully I achieved my purpose.

#### Statement of Three Ancillary Purposes

First, this project demonstrates the use of media in the local church for the purpose of Christian education.



I believe that the process of Christian education in the local church can be augmented through the videotape presentations of important resource persons such as Soleri. Such persons would normally be unavailable for personal interviews, so videotape increases their potential influence. Further, the use of videotape decreases the possibility of misunderstanding the concepts explored.

Second, the documentation of Soleri and the concepts he presents in this videotape will be of future value. From the perspective of history, this is important if for no other reason than documentation. This videotape records the image, voice, and concepts of a man who, if he is correct in his theories, will have a profound effect on the course of human history. If he is wrong, it is still important to document him as one of the many thinkers proposing solutions to the problems of our time. This type of documentation is as important as that of the printed word.

Third, this project serves the purpose of integrating the disciplines of theology and Christian education, meshing the critical thinking necessary in the areas of theology and Christian education in order to bring about a thoughtful and cohesive examination of Paolo Soleri and his vision of an alternate lifestyle.

#### Limitations of the Project

This project is limited to the following two

parameters.

1. The video presentation is designed to address only one aspect of Soleri's thought. That aspect is the alternate lifestyle Arcosanti represents. The majority of this material is based on his book The Bridge Between Matter and Spirit is Matter Becoming Spirit, which is the most helpful statement of his thought available in print. I have not thoroughly studied other writings by and about Soleri.

2. The technique used to evaluate the response to this presentation lacks rigor and sophistication. Its results are suggestive of the subjective impact. Also, the group studied was far too small for any generalizations to be possible.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STORY OF THE PROJECT

I came to the School of Theology at Claremont with few, if any, concrete plans and with many misconceptions, but with a genuine desire to serve God. I remember the final year of my Masters of Arts program when, in conversation with the campus minister, he evaluated my readiness for enrolling in seminary. "You've got a lot going for you, but you need to learn the 'God talk'." Although he was a fine pastor and had a great heart, I have come to understand from the perspective of eight years that seminary involved much more than learning "God talk."

I have always loved words and the intricacies of their meaning. I researched the meaning of the word "seminary" before I came to S.T.C. and found it meant seed bed. Nothing, I think, could ever describe my experiences at seminary better. Seminary for me became a seed bed germinating the theological understanding of how God works in us and in our world. It took my psychologically founded system of ethics and enabled it to blossom into an ethical understanding of how we can act as humans. It replaced the how we must act of deterministic psychology with the how we are enabled to act in faith.

Ethics and faith are two of the areas of my life in which I expected to grow. Media enrichment was a third equally important, but completely unexpected, area of growth. Claremont gave me the opportunity of hands on experience. Through the seminary's nurture I grounded

myself in the reasons for the use of media in the local church; I experimented with the application of media there; and I became excited about the potential.

I was asked by Steve Jackson, Director of the Inter-faith Media Center, if I would be willing to meet with Willard Stevens, Pastor of Point Loma United Methodist Church, concerning the production of a film about a man named Paolo Soleri. The grant for this film's production came from the National Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church. The film was to be a limited presentation of the architect Soleri and his views of arcology. Arcology is a contraction designed to convey the two-fold interests of Soleri: architecture and ecology. Soleri has been called a prophet, a visionary, and a futurist. I felt that it was important to bring this man and his ideas to local congregations. Soleri was addressing many of the problems which threaten our very existence on this planet. His concern is for humanity and for how an ecological architecture could help us.

I have two major reasons for presenting Soleri and his thought. First, Soleri is right in his charge that the cities of the world are not the humanizing agents they should be. Second, Soleri has something to say regarding the city and its future possibilities.

He is building a city north of Phoenix which is designed to take into account the architectural and ecol-

gical categories which he feels are important to human existence. It was our hope in producing this film that, in small study groups across the church, people would be exposed to the man Soleri and to his vision.

It is not necessary to be an architect, ecologist or prophet to realize at a deep level the basic truth that our cities are not working. It is not necessary to visit all the major cities of the world to realize that in city after city the same errors of design have been made by decision or indecision. Our experience today is that of watching the heart and center of cities decay and die. The people of city after city spread out and into the surrounding areas, creating what we have come to call urban sprawl. This urban sprawl has devoured rich acre after rich acre of fertile land. Such land was fertile not only in its potential for growing the crops which we need to sustain us, but also in its potential for recreation. The fertility of the land includes its potential to feed our souls as well as our bodies. We have watched as urban sprawl has left a vacuum within our cities which sucks in and traps the unwanted peoples of our society. In this situation, set up by our decision and indecision, we find people drawn in divergent directions. Part of humanity is drawn like a magnet to the center of urban decay. The other part of humanity is drawn toward the ever increasing urban sprawl. This sprawl is fueled by the search for status addresses and for tri-levels

in the suburbs.

Soleri has something to say which is very important in this regard. His vision of what a city can and must be is in sharp contrast to our experience of the city. He affirms that we need first to design the city we wish to create. He is not speaking merely of designing the way in which streets should be layed out in order to insure efficient access to needed services. He is speaking of a design which includes ready access for all to all important facilities. Soleri is speaking of a design which takes into account the basic evolutionary processes which he sees at work in the course of time on a cosmic scale. His vision includes the concepts of miniaturization, complexification, and implosion. These three concepts will be explained in some detail in a later section of this paper. For the present let the following definitions suffice. Miniaturization is the evolutionary process by which organisms become more complex through compression. Implosion is the mechanism by which miniaturization and complexification occur. Instead of energy expanding in an explosion, we have energy being intensified by an implosion.

These three points are of fundamental importance to Soleri's vision of human existence as he projects it into his new city. Miniaturization and complexification reverse the drive for status space which results in urban sprawl. Dwellings are not designed to represent the newest model in

habitats. Developments are not designed to entice people by seclusive space or an exclusive area. Habitats are built to mimic the miniaturization and complexification already a part of and successful in nature. The heart of cities will no longer die, creating a vacuum pulling in the outcasts of society, because the entire process of implosion drives the city to move in on itself, making room for all by the miniaturization and complexification of the dwelling unit. Implosive energy is not simply a useful term to describe this process but is an actual source of energy supplying the city's need for fuel. Consider the simplified city designed with these concepts in mind. Perhaps the factories of the city would be placed at the lowest level, with waste heat providing energy for the entire city. Children would not be separated from their parents by work, because centers of work would be close to the family home rather than miles away. Time for leisure, study, and the building of community would be available because there would no longer be the need to spend hours commuting on freeways. Finally, land would be saved for agricultural and recreational use and aesthetic enjoyment. This is in contrast to the voracious appetite of urban sprawl, dictated by flight from the decaying heart of the city and personal greed for status space, which wastes the land's resources.

I believe that the concerns mentioned above are important to our human existence. I believe that the church



has a call to proclaim a new and more human solution to problems of dehumanization. Presenting this man and his vision for a new city will give persons gathered in small study groups the opportunity to discuss his vision. They can then support it when they feel in agreement, probe it where they have serious questions, and become challenged by it to push beyond their previously held convictions of what a city is or can become.

Robert Rusach, a Bishop of the Episcopal Church, speaking to the 1978 Pacific Southwest Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, shared with us some thoughts concerning the need for and a possible method of proclaiming the good news of the gospel. "We are called to proclaim the good news from the roof tops. Today there is a T.V. antenna on top of every roof. The implication should be clear." The implication that the Bishop feels should be clear is the imperative to use every medium at our disposal to proclaim the good news of the gospel. The Bishop helps us to see the universal availability of television in our culture.

Soleri's arcology touches many of today's concerns which are gathering ominously on the horizon of history. He responds to many of our ecological problems. His thoughts address the problems in our cities in regard to the type and depth of intentional design. His view of what the future can be for humanity dwelling on the planet earth is tied to his concepts of arcology. This future does not embody the

totality of the gospel, but it does touch on concerns which are vitally important as humanity endeavors to live out the call of the gospel in a communal fashion.

Soleri's vision of a new city gives us an answer to the problem of urban sprawl. The word sprawl is not chosen simply because of its sound. Its definition is apropos. Sprawl means to spread out with uncertainty. It means the thoughtless building and usurption of land previously used for agriculture, recreation, and aesthetic enjoyment. These are the prices we pay for urban sprawl. We have the choice of a growth that is intentionally designed to build on itself or the ungraceful, uncertain design that has been the pattern of our major cities and is mimicked to one degree or another by smaller cities.

Soleri has deep concerns for the earth's resources. His vision gives us a method of safe-guarding the resources by doing more with less (miniaturization, complexification and implosion). His concern for the earth's resources includes a concern for its human resources. His vision of a city addresses the alienation in our present cities. We are not going to bring in the kingdom of heaven by building a heavenly city. We are, however, called to work toward the kingdom of heaven. If that means using Soleri's vision of a city to remove some of the barriers to fostering good community, then we need to listen to him.

Paolo Soleri cares for what humanity's future can

be. I have used the word *can* here because I want to stress the contribution that Soleri's view of the future offers us. For Soleri the future is not static; it is something that has possibility. We give life to the possibilities in the future by our actions starting today and by proceeding into this future of possibility. His vision of a city is of a nurturing habitat for humanity. His vision of that humanity is one in which we are brothers and sisters to each other in a nurturing community. His future is alive with the possibility of an evolving which is moving toward a disparate hope in place of a desperate destiny.

This is a capsule of what I intended to communicate to study groups. Soleri's vision for the city of tomorrow that is now being constructed in the Central Arizona high desert can be provocative for the people of the church, challenging us to look beyond the boundaries of established thought and practice. This video program was intended to be viewed by and have an impact on the people of the church. It was intended to meet them where they are and to spark a vision in them of what the city can be now and could be in the future.

The making of the videotape was a process extending from its conception as a project in the fall of 1977 until its final completion in the fall of 1979. I speak of the project as a videotape, but it was originally to be a super-8 film. We had decided to use the super-8 film format

because in 1977 the future seemed to hold the possibility that many churches would own a super-8 sound projector just as currently they own 16mm projectors. That attempt at guessing the future was not successful. The electronic advent of 3/4 inch video cassette, 1/2 inch video cassette and the video disk player have eclipsed the popularity of the super-8 sound projector. I will summarize the history of the decision to produce the project in the medium of 3/4 inch video cassette in the discussion of the editing process.

In February of 1978, Willard Stevens; Ignacio Castuera, Director of All Nations Foundation in Los Angeles; Pat Hammer, President of United Methodist Women for the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference, and I met to plan the script for the film. The film appeared to fall naturally into two sections. The first section was to display a large city, Los Angeles, on its best terms and to use it as a backdrop for a conversation between Castuera and Hammer. The second section of the film was to represent the city as it could be. To achieve this we decided to use Arcosanti as a visual backdrop for an interview of Soleri by Stevens.

For the first section we picked two locations which we felt would show Los Angeles to its best advantage. Our first location was to be the Griffith Park Observatory with the city spread out at Ignacio and Pat's feet as they discussed its potential and its problems. The second location for this section was to have been Olvera Street in downtown

Los Angeles. We picked this site for its color, people, cultural flavor and excitement.

The second section of the film was to be made on location at the Cosanti Foundation in Tempe, Arizona, and at Arcosanti, 40 miles north of Phoenix. These two locations were to form the visual backdrop for an interview with Soleri. Extra footage was filmed at these two locations for the eventual editing together of highly visual aspects of Cosanti Foundation and Arcosanti into a film sequence. This film sequence was then to be synchronized with music and added to the final film as a visual feast of what Soleri had verbally described in his interview.

The city "as it can be" was filmed in the spring of 1978 on location at the Cosanti Foundation and at Arcosanti. The film footage was very good and we were able to record many of the visually striking aspects of both locales. This trip also served as a good exposure to the emotional environment which Soleri is trying to create with his new city. Our hope was that we could create that same kind of emotional impact with visual images through film.

There was one basic problem. The sound equipment did not perform in the way we had hoped. The problem was not mechanical. The problem was that I had asked the equipment to do things it could not do. I had not taken into account the ambient noise in an outside interview, nor had I anticipated that Soleri would be as soft spoken as he was.

In combination these two unanticipated factors made recording impossible. If the recording volume was turned down to filter out some of the ambient sound, the soft spoken Soleri could not be heard. If the recording volume was turned up adequately for Soleri to be heard, that also increased the ambient sound being recorded.

This technical problem was resolved by using a sound mixer. With the mixer we would increase the volume of Soleri's voice while keeping the volume of Stevens' voice at a normal level. In order to filter out the ambient sound, we opted for the laveler microphone which would, in effect, record both the interviewer and interviewee at audible levels while still allowing for a little ambient sound to filter into the film.

We agreed that the footage which we had was visually good but that it could not be used because of the poor sound quality. We rescheduled the location shooting, for early fall of 1978, shooting only at Arcosanti and leaving out the Cosanti Foundation. We then would use the mixer and laveler mikes in order to solve our sound problems.

For the location filming of "the city as it is" we wanted a beautiful day. We felt that this was important because we wanted people to focus on the positive nature of the Soleri vision instead of focusing on the negatives of urban existence as practiced worldwide. The first week of June 1978 brought us just what we wanted, one of those clear

days which motivate people to move to Southern California.

The footage we took then was very good visually and verbally. Both the Griffith Park location and Olvera Street brought to the screen the exact message that we had wanted to project. The image of Los Angeles stretching out behind Castuera and Hammer did have an impact. The color and activity of the life on Olvera Street also came to life on the screen. After reviewing the footage shot at both locations, we felt that it was the quality of material which we wanted to use in this production.

We went back to Arcosanti in the last week of August 1978 to film the Stevens-Soleri interview again. We used the mixer and laveler microphones which had been so successful on location in Los Angeles. The material was excellent in both imagery and verbal content. We decided after reviewing the film footage that it was of sufficient quality to be incorporated into the "city as it can be" section of the film. There was, however, one problem with the Arcosanti location footage. The wind obscured what Soleri was saying for a few seconds. Yet the general quality of the footage, both visually and verbally, was so good that we decided to include it in spite of the three or four seconds of poor sound.

After we had finished the filming of the "city as it is" and the "city as it could be" sections, we reviewed what we had completed and concluded that something was missing.

We felt that we needed a section which would assist in the transition between the two parts. That bridge needed to be something which dealt with both sections of the film. It was decided that we would use the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Gardens in Claremont, California as an example of what cities as they exist are doing right. We would have Stevens speak, thinking this would add to the bridging effect, because he appeared in the second section of the film as Soleri's interviewer.

We had also added a new factor to our film which was to have eventual and revolutionary consequences for our finished project. It changed our distribution medium from sound super-8 film to 3/4 inch videotape cassette.

Our first location shooting had been done with a silent super-8 camera. Our intention was to cut the silent film and to have it printed with a sound track. Then, in order to make it a sound film, we would simply dub in the sound track. This seemed reasonable until I began to grasp the scope of the film in terms of its interviews. It suddenly appeared almost impossible to have persons achieve the dubbing with any sense of authenticity and life.

Based on these considerations we decided to use a sound super-8 camera to shoot the Los Angeles location footage. We were very pleased with this arrangement and it worked well in combination with our mixer and laveler microphones. This solution, however, necessitated our adoption



of a new medium for editing the exposed film.

The process of editing super-8 film is a simple one. Once the editing decisions have been made, sections are deleted and the remaining portions are glued or taped together. During the editing of sound super-8 film, the sound impulse on the sound track is a second to second and a half ahead of the image being projected. If the film is cut at the frame bearing the image, a second to a second and a half of the sound is lost. If sound film is edited at the impulse on the sound track, what remains is a second and a half of images which do not relate to the sound impulse.

Our solution to this problem was simple. The sound super-8 film was "read" on a video reader. This process transfers the film image to video and sound impulses on a videotape. The videotape was edited on the one-inch video players which were made available through the Interfaith Media Center at the School of Theology at Claremont. Although I had primary responsibility for the editing, I did not have the technical expertise or the experience necessary to edit videotape. I, therefore, enlisted the help of Peter Forney, technician for the Interfaith Media Center, as the technical video editor. I remained responsible for the content decision of the finished videotape project, but Forney was the person who actually pushed the buttons.

The editing process took place in three major blocks of time. The fall of 1978 was used primarily to review the

super-8 sound footage and to make decisions concerning which "takes" or segments of the film were the best and should, therefore, be included in the finished film. The editing of the silent super-8 film, the highly visual parts of Arcosanti, was completed during the spring of 1979. The plan was to use this silent film by synchronizing it with music. This combination of image and sound would then be the final visual feast to convey the vision of what the city could be. During this block, Forney and I edited three quarters of the final videotape. The final editing was completed in November of 1979, when we added the music and the credits.

One major obstacle arose with the integration of the final section of the video project. When I took the edited silent super-8 film of Arcosanti to have it "read" onto three quarter inch videotape, the video reader was not working properly. The image which resulted was too unstable to edit into the final project, and I decided to complete the film without this visual display of Arcosanti. This decision was made for two reasons. First, I was feeling a tremendous sense of pressure to finish the videotape and have it sent off to The Board of Discipleship in Nashville. We had already spent two years, and it was my judgment that we should send the video project as soon as possible. Second, we had overrun our budget by approximately 25% and everything we spent over budget was coming from Stevens' personal funds.

I now believe that this was a poor decision, influenced too much by my personal frustration with the length of the project. The visual display of Arcosanti was an integral part of the film and the potential of the project to help persons glimpse the Soleri vision was seriously diminished by the omission. In effect, this left the film with only the verbal impact of Soleri. Although he certainly has the ability to communicate his vision of the city as it can be, a good film requires the sort of visual impact a showing of Arcosanti could have had.

During the three-year process of completing this videotape program, I entertained the possibility of using it as my doctor of ministry project. My hope was, as I set up a viewing of the video program with John B. Cobb, Jr., Ingraham Professor of Theology at the School of Theology at Claremont, and Steve Jackson, that the project would magically be all that was required. The evaluation of Cobb and Jackson were supportive of my using this as my project. However, they indicated that I needed to supplement the video program with a written paper. This paper would include a leader's guide. The benefit of this leader's guide would be found in the assistance it would give to people across the church in preparing for and leading a group in discussion of the film. It was for this purpose that the leader's guide was written to include resource information, concept clarification, a presentation process, and a basic

outline of the videotape.

It was my intention, by combining the videotape and leader's guide, to put into the hands of discussion group leaders a solid video presentation. It would be one which could be used either by a person who was very familiar with Soleri's thought and work or a person who had little previous experience with the architect and his city.

This resultant paper serves the dual roles of clarifying the assumptions, procedures, and evaluation of the project, while at the same time giving the leaders of groups discussing this project resource and process information. It is a paper which makes the video presentation understandable as a project which does, in fact, integrate my education at the School of Theology at Claremont.

CHAPTER III

ARCOSANTI: AN ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE

A Leader's Guide to the Videotape Presentation  
of Paolo Soleri

# ARCOSANTI: AN ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLE

## A Leader's Guide to the Videotape Presentation of Paolo Soleri

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## INTRODUCTION

Arcosanti: An Alternative Lifestyle is a videotape presentation of the Italian-born architect, Paolo Soleri. Soleri worked with architect Frank Lloyd Wright for 18 months at the Taliesin West Center in Scottsdale, Arizona. Then in 1949 Soleri broke off from Wright and formed his own center for architecture, the Cosanti Foundation. The word Cosanti means to be against things but the things were not objects in general. The "things" Soleri aligned himself against was and still is the materialism of human life--a materialism, which has made physical possessions the highest priority of human existence. The materialism Soleri opposes is illustrated by consumerism, but it is not limited to that. He sees the very structures in which we live, our cities, as examples on a grander scale of the materialization we have associated with consumerism. He has coined the word arcology to communicate his view of what a city can be when free of this materialism. Arcology is really a contraction of two words, architecture and ecology, and it conveys two of Soleri's major interests. First, it shows his concern that the architecture of our cities must be a humanizing influence instead of a destructive one. Second, it expresses his concern for ecology so that the planet on which we live can be capable of the continued support of a humanizing experience. Without an ecology which supports

(2)

human life there can be no future planning by humanity.

Soleri's vision of a city in harmony with the assumptions of arcology is being concretized in the central Arizona desert 40 miles north of Phoenix. The city is designed for a population of 5,000 and is presently three percent completed.

The church has many concerns about the quality of life on our planet. The city and ecology are certainly important issues which need to be addressed in a fresh and imaginative way. God has asked us as a people of faith to seek and to work for loving answers to potentially life-destroying developments in these areas. Soleri has a vision of what architecture and ecology can be in our world. His city, Arcosanti, offers an alternative to our current lifestyle. Concerned people within the United Methodist Church want to make the presentation of this man and his vision available to groups through the church. Toward that goal the Board of Discipleship has produced this videotape. It is the hope of the Board that this presentation will serve as a source of Christian education and a springboard for Christian discussion.

### THREE IMPORTANT CONCEPTS OF PAOLO SOLERI'S THOUGHT

". . .we are what we make of our environment."<sup>1</sup>

Simply stated, Soleri views the development of the city as having a direct tie to the evolutionary theory of

(3)



development in nature.<sup>2</sup> When he is asked what is wrong with the way in which cities today are developed, he answers the question with a question. He asks what fails in nature. Organisms which fail, not necessarily at any given time but over the history of their existence, are those which are gigantic in proportions. Gigantism then limits the organism to sluggish responses and to a dulled existence. This sluggishness and dullness are dictated by the gigantic organism principally because of its tremendous size.

Along with the gigantism develops the necessary simplification of the organism.<sup>3</sup> This simplification is dictated by the diffused nature of the organism. This is an example of exploded growth which has brought the organism to this stage of development. The obvious and easiest example of this is the dinosaur. An accepted evolutionary theory suggests that the ultimate end of the dinosaur was a direct result of its development as an organism. As the temperature changed on the planet affecting the availability of food, the gigantism and simplification of the dinosaur doomed it to extinction. Its gigantic size dictated the sluggish and dulled ability to respond to a new environment. Its simplification made it impossible to develop other, more complex reactions to the changing environment. The result was the death of a single creature and a response pattern, dictated by its development, which brought about the extinction of all dinosaurs. Our cities, if they continue

as they are and continue to be planned as they have been in the past, will experience the same fate of extinction. Their size and propensity for simplification will program their destruction.<sup>4</sup>

When Soleri is asked how is it possible to plan and develop a successful living city, he answers again with a question. He asks what succeeds in nature. Successful organisms are those which, as they develop, become more complex in their ability to deal with the environment.<sup>5</sup> This tenet is characterized in Soleri's thought as complexification. It is important not to misunderstand this concept. It is not simply a matter of being more complicated. It is a matter of actually broadening the borders of the organisms' responses. As it develops in complexification, an organism performs more and more tasks which previously had not been a part of its behavioral repertoire.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of this increased complexification, and at the same time developmentally, the organism is contracting its available space. This contraction of space is described in Soleri's words as miniaturization. In fact, in the Soleri system complexification demands miniaturization.<sup>7</sup> Miniaturization is not exclusion of detail as we might think of a miniature house. The concept is the opposite. Miniaturization is the inclusion of more and more detail as opposed to the exclusion of detail. Inherent in the concept is the goal of putting more into less space.<sup>8</sup>

It is the concept of increasing the efficiency of the organism's performance by making more resources available. A miniature house is a perfect example of what miniaturization is not. The concept is not the shrinking of an object. It is the expulsion of every unnecessary thing and the ingathering of every necessary thing for its existence.<sup>9</sup>

This complexification and miniaturization are not processes that occur overnight. Soleri conceives of these developments as evolutionary outcomes which must not be expected quickly. The time necessary to bring about the complexification and miniaturization must be measured by the beat of thousands of years. Although he does not know what will be the final outcome, Soleri is convinced that, if planning is not instituted at once, our ability to make the decision in the future may be precluded by an ecology which would no longer be able to support human planning.

Complexification and miniaturization are in actuality one process.<sup>10</sup> An organism cannot complexify without a corollary miniaturization and vice versa. If we would take as our model the evolutionary development from protozoa to human beings, we detect both complexification and miniaturization. The complexification of the organism develops its ability to meet the changing environment. As the complexity increases, there is also a corresponding contraction of space. This contraction of space is the miniaturization of the instruments needed for its existence in midst of

change.<sup>11</sup> It is through this evolutionary development that the two principles of complexification and miniaturization are seen by Soleri as being not only beneficial to life but also necessary for its very presence. This is as relevant for the evolving city as it is for the evolving organism. Soleri says "The planner who does not grasp the inevitability of this advent is out of touch with the teaching of the geophysical and biosocial, out of touch with reality."<sup>12</sup>

Soleri uses the human brain to exemplify this development of the complexification and miniaturization in the evolutionary sweep of life.<sup>13</sup> As the needs of the human ancestors became acute, the brain developed in complexification. That is, it developed its ability to perform the functions which were needed. Had the brain not developed in this complexification mode, meeting the demands of the environment of our pre-human ancestor, we would not be where we are today. Along with the increased complexification developed the miniaturization needed to meet the needs of the complex behavior required by the environment. The brain "grew" more and more compact with this process of miniaturization. The compaction which must occur along with the complexification and miniaturization is described by Soleri as implosion. This implosion then creates the energy out of the compacting matter and results in the explosion of creative thoughts.<sup>14</sup> This mental explosion of creative thought is the powerful thrust of the mind and

spirit beyond the physical barriers of matter. It is brought about by the implosive pressures in complexification and miniaturization of the brain. This explosion of creative thought was the evolutionary leap over the abyss which separates the nonhuman animal world and the thinking human species. By the development of the city into urban sites which make use of complexification and miniaturization, Soleri believes it is possible to generate the implosive energy which would result in an urban explosion of creativity.<sup>15</sup>

What he has done is to take an evolutionary model and apply it to urban planning. His goal is the transformation of matter--that is steel, mortar, and brick--into the spirit, that is, the explosive creativity which would result from the implosive compacting through complexification and miniaturization. He has been clear in pointing out that he does not offer a solution for the problem we face in our cities. Paolo does suggest, however, a direction toward which we can travel as we look for and work toward a solution. He is lobbying for the implosive direction instead of the explosive diffused direction.<sup>16</sup>

The implosive direction is the direction of frugality. It is through the frugal option that matter, objects and humanity would be imploded so as to bring about the explosion of creativity. By this option, Soleri sees humanity as evolving a step higher.<sup>17</sup> The other option is

the explosive direction. This option is referred to as opulence. Matter, objects and humanity explode in a diffused gigantic sprawl. With this unplanned and diffused explosion escapes the creative potential which is wasted by the absence of the complexification, miniaturization, and implosion.<sup>18</sup> With the option of frugality Soleri sees the creative possibility which for him equals life.<sup>19</sup> With the option of opulence there is the withered creative potential. This withered creative potential is equaled with death.

The goal of the creative use of matter is the release of spirit.<sup>20</sup> Matter is the starting point. Spirit is the goal. For Soleri this theory is the bridge which spans between matter and spirit. It is the key which unlocks the secret of creating spirit out of matter. When matter is subjected to the evolutionary principles of complexification, miniaturization, and the implosive power it creates through compaction, the result is the release of potential spirit from that matter. The matter transcends itself into a powerful creative force. Soleri's vision of a new city, a more humane existence, and a vital ecology is powered by this spirit of creative potential which transcends itself from the matter state. As the spirit transcends matter, so a new city can transcend the urban and suburban hell. Such a hell has been created through the diffused explosion of growth which has resulted from our

inability or refusal to plan within the boundaries of the evolutionary model.

Soleri writes,

It is as if the spirit of which matter is soaked, saturated, will come to life and activate itself only when exuded out of the structure of matter itself through the formidable pressure of complexification-miniaturization.<sup>21</sup>

For him, the bridge making the transcendence of matter into spirit possible is the combination of three forces inherent in existence. It is at that point that matter transcends itself and becomes spirit.<sup>22</sup>

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR THE LEADER

Read this leader's guide once in its entirety in order to familiarize yourself with the background and thought of Paolo Soleri. You can always go back and study a section more completely when you have a feeling for the whole presentation. Organize your thoughts with a few notes so that your presentation of whatever background material you decide to use will have some structure. Set one or two goals for yourself as you prepare for this presentation. One goal might be simply that, after your introduction and the videotape presentation, persons in your group will be able to recognize one main point of Soleri's thought (implosion for example).

One of the cardinal rules for any audio-visual presentation is that one must preview the material. It is

important also to preview the room in which the presentation will be made to determine whether there are electric outlets to power the video cassette player. If you are using an extension cord, check to be certain that it is working properly. Cassette players come in many different models. Make sure that the cassette you have fits the player you intend to use. Preview the content of the Soleri videotape. You may want to make note of particular points in the presentation to augment the small group discussion.

Remember that your role in this presentation is an important one, as you must lead the group in its discussion. A part of that role is to generate discussion and that means encouraging its beginning. Perhaps you would find it useful to mention one or two thoughts which occurred as you watched and listened to Soleri.

Facilitating discussion is also an important role that you will want to fulfill. To facilitate a discussion means to help it along by asking helpful questions of the group while it is dealing with the subject. It also means helping the group to stay centered on the subject of the presentation. One part of your role is to help focus the discussion on Soleri and his vision of an alternative lifestyle. A second part of your role is to help focus the discussion on how the church can incorporate a vision of the future such as Soleri's Arcosanti.



## PRESENTATION PROCESS

A. Introduce Soleri to your small group using the background information you have selected from this leader's guide and outside readings you might have chosen from the resource book list in this guide.

People in local churches will not always have the time or the finances necessary to travel to Arcosanti and talk with Soleri. You as the leader will not always have the time or motivation to master all the information needed to present Soleri to your local church without a prepared resource. This cassette makes it possible for Soleri and his vision of the future to be presented to you and others conveniently in the local church setting. It represents him in a way that is immediate and firsthand, drawing on his experience and study. This can allow you, the leader, to do what only you can do--wrestle with the questions and challenges until the experience yields its value to you and the group.

5 Min.

5 Total

B. Show the Videotape.

There are some benefits which are inherent in the videotape format. You and the group have the ability to start and stop the videotape at any point you wish. This is a luxury which, depending on the request for review, could become exasperating in live presentation. You can

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alternate between presentation and discussion at the touch of a finger. This offers you flexibility in designing your presentation format. This flexibility to start and stop also affords you the ability to review salient details.

The videotape format also allows for concentrated study by you, the leader, and by the small group with which you are working. You and the group may decide to use only a section of the videotape and to do expanded reading and discussion over that section before moving on to another section of the presentation.

Unlike a film presentation, we encourage the lights to be left on during the screening of the videotape. The presence of light discourages our slipping into a passive mode of viewing, and this is the way people have been trained to watch television. Partial darkness will dampen the group dynamic and this dynamic is one of your important tools in leading your group through this presentation. With the lights on, eye contact between the group is encouraged along with discussion. These are important factors in a group presentation and discussion.

25 Min.      30 Total

C. Ask the group to share both positive and negative facts of the city as it is. Use a blackboard or butcher paper to record these responses.

15 Min.      45 Total

D. Ask the group to share images which might have come to mind during the presentation of Soleri. Use a blackboard or butcher paper to record these responses.

15 Min.      60 Total

E. Break the group into smaller sections of two or three persons. Ask each of these smaller groups to discuss how it might be possible for the church to incorporate Soleri's vision of the future.

15 Min.      75 Total

F. Ask the smaller groups to report their thoughts. Use a blackboard or butcher paper to record the feedback from these smaller groups.

10 Min.      85 Total

G. Ask the entire group for thoughts or comments as the discussion time ends.

5 Min.      90 Total

#### OPTIONAL CLOSING

H. You could now make a brief statement which sums up the presentation and discussion in such a way as to bring a sense of closure for yourself and the others in the group.

## EQUIPMENT NEEDED

1. Television monitor, at least one for every 20 persons.
2. Video cassette player.
3. The videotape "An Alternative Lifestyle."
4. Blackboard and chalk or butcher paper and a marker.
5. Watch.

## RESOURCE BOOK LIST

- Soleri, Paolo. Arcology; The City in the Image of Man. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969.
- Soleri, Paolo. The Bridge Between Matter and Spirit is Matter Becoming Spirit. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973.
- Soleri, Paolo. Fragments: A Selection from the Sketchbooks of Paolo Soleri: The Tiger Paradigm-Paradox. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980.
- Soleri, Paolo. The Omega Seed: New Writings by the Architect of Arcosanti. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981.

## OUTLINE OF VIDEOTAPE

- I. Introduction
  - A. Planet earth-credits
  - B. Landscape
  - C. Cityscape-credits
- II. The City as it is
  - A. Griffith Park

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1. Enormity of park
  2. Lack of open space in city
  3. Distances in city increasing
  - B. Los Angeles in background
    1. Lives bound up in asphalt and concrete
    2. Car is an invader in the city
    3. Freeways and smog show need for change
    4. We need an alternative
      - a. Paolo Soleri
      - b. Arcosanti
    5. Memory of visit to Arcosanti
  - C. Olvera Street
    1. No walls
    2. Safety in city is a concern
    3. Walls are frightening
      - a. Fence some people out
      - b. Fence some people in
    4. Authenticity vs. artificiality
- III. Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Gardens
- A. Garden spot in a metropolitan area
    1. People come here to escape city
    2. Some people are trying to create this  
on a larger scale.
  - B. Paolo Soleri, futurist architect
    1. Extracts best of city
    2. Eliminates automobiles

- C. Arcology is contraction of:
    - 1. Architecture
    - 2. Ecology
  - C. Arcology concept is mind-boggling
    - 1. Populations of 4,000,000 in a floating city
    - 2. People's reactions
      - a. Frightens some people
      - b. Fascinates some people
      - c. A few people want to learn from concept
  - E. Urban suburban transition: 40's and 50's
  - F. Representatives from many disciplines are contributing to arcology concepts
  - G. Care of citizen is the sap of the city
  - H. Church has emphasized love within family bond--family unit
  - I. Through this film we hope to look at an alternative family life in the future
- IV. City as it can be
- A. Family life advantages in an arcology
    - 1. Family is less separated
      - a. Distance
      - b. Space
      - c. Time
    - 2. Parents can work close to family

3. Arcosanti is designed for a population  
of 5,000 or 1,500 families plus  
singles
  - B. Where would the church be in an arcology?
    1. Habitat should have the sacred injected  
into it
    2. Town is the church
    3. Town is to be all functions of human  
life
  - C. Town has a theological groundwork to it
    1. If premises are not consumerism but  
value, then premises are theological
    2. We are dealing with something that is  
greater than what we are as indivi-  
duals
  - C. Theological basement explains the situation
- V. Final Credits
- A. Cityscape
  - B. City traffic--credits
  - C. City street
  - D. City fountain--credits
  - E. City park
  - F. Participants

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Paolo Soleri, The Bridge Between Matter and Spirit is Matter Becoming Spirit (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 203-240.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 189.



## CHAPTER IV

### A REPORT OF A VIDEOTAPE PRESENTATION

This chapter will report the presentation of Soleri and his vision to a very small group through the media of 1) the video cassette presentation and 2) the Leader's Guide. This took place on the campus of the School of Theology at Claremont on Wednesday, November 4, 1981. This chapter will describe what happened and the technique used to evaluate the subjective responses of the participants.

The five participants in this presentation ranged in ages from 28 to 72 with an average age of 40. There was a student, a retail manager, a retail sales person, a housewife, and a retiree. Their educational backgrounds varied from high school to post graduate education. Three of the five had some previous exposure to Soleri's ideas while the remaining two had none. The three participants who had been exposed previously to Soleri described their knowledge as ranging from a 20 minute section on the NBC program "60 Minutes" to an in-depth study of and visit to Arcosanti. This group of five participants was recruited by personal invitation and by general announcement in the San Dimas Community Church bulletin.

The presentation format followed the leader's guide precisely and consisted of three sections: 1) the introduction of Soleri and a brief overview of his thought; 2) the viewing of the videotape including the interview with Soleri; and 3) a discussion designed to facilitate understanding of Soleri and the relationship between his

vision of the future and the vision projected by the church.

The introductory section consisted of selected information concerning Soleri. This section included a biographical sketch of Soleri as well as the major concepts of his thought system: complexification, miniaturization, and implosion. When describing these three concepts I limited my remarks to the information available in the leader's guide in order to achieve a better evaluation of the guide and its ability to make Soleri and his concepts understandable to the person who has not had special training either in Soleri's thought or in Christian educational theory. In keeping with the guidelines, I allotted five minutes for the introduction.

Viewing the videotape comprised the second part of the presentation. There were many mechanical problems to overcome in this section of the presentation, including a power failure and a video cassette player malfunction. These two mechanical problems are the types of physical variables which confront any electronic presentation. The problems of power disruption and electro-mechanical failure confronted during this presentation have prompted the addition to the leader's guide of two important steps for a successful presentation. The participants reported no significant interruption in their ability to view the videotape as a result of the mechanical problems present

during the presentation.

The small group discussion format described in the leader's guide was followed closely in structure and time allowances. The instructions in the leader's guide were followed so closely as even to divide the group of five into two smaller groups of two and three persons.

The technique used for the evaluation of the videotape and leader's guide section was a series of four questions asked of the participants in an informal interview after the completion of the presentation. I asked only for the subjective impressions of the five participants. The interviews were from 15 to 30 minutes in length. The four questions were:

1. Was the presentation clear?
2. Was the presentation provocative?
3. Was the presentation challenging to your view of the city?
  - a. Did the presentation challenge your view of the city as it is?
  - b. Did the presentation challenge your view of the city as it could be?
4. Do you think you will change in any way, directly or indirectly, as a result of this presentation?

The responses of the participants to the first question represented a broad spectrum and were, on the

whole, positive. Some comments were concerned with the lack of clarity in the videotape interview, but this problem must be tolerated as it is unlikely that any revision of the videotape will be made. One response to the first question affirmed the overall clarity of the presentation format described in the leader's guide; it is a strong indication that the leader's guide is needed to enable the videotape to communicate effectively.

The participants as a whole were supportive of the presentation as a resource that can be used to stimulate people's thinking. One participant commented that it ". . . offered me a chance to think about this (Arcosanti). I could participate in it." Obviously, it touched this participant deeply and, consequently, ignited some new thinking. There were some responses which were not supportive of this position. Those persons who did not see this presentation as being stimulating might be those whose backgrounds and/or vocations have previously brought them into contact with Soleri's thinking. This previous contact would certainly decrease the novelty of his concepts and thereby reduce the stimulation derived from this presentation. Perhaps a real strength of this presentation is its use of the small group discussion format outlined in the leader's guide.

In question three the participants responded affirmatively that the presentation challenged their view

of the city both "as it is" and "as it can be." The presentation sparked discussion in the small groups. By evidence of subjective report from this evaluative technique, the presentation successfully challenged people's views of the city. The participants' responses to both parts of question three indicate that their feelings as well as their thinking had been challenged. From responses such as ". . .physical structures do influence social structures. . ." or ". . .thinking about what impact our lifestyles have on the environment. . ." it is a short step to an emotional change and an actual impact on people's lives. The degree of that challenge and impact actually felt may have been related to the type and amount of previous exposure to Soleri and his vision.

The responses of the participants to the fourth question did not indicate that a direct change in their behavior was imminent. A direct change in their behavior, however, was not at issue. The question was, rather, will you change in any way? Their responses did indicate that the presentation effected some change. One participant volunteered that she was going to ". . .take more seriously how I can integrate his (Soleri's) concepts and my lifestyle. . ." One man said this presentation had motivated him to discuss this alternate lifestyle with others. The first response exemplified critical reflection. The second response points toward action. Both critical reflection

and action are required for change. I contend from the responses that the presentation effected change in some of the participants.

The presentation format in the leader's guide is strong in the following areas. It gives a solid approach to discussing the videotape. It provides enough structure to facilitate the leader in guiding the small group in its discussion. The section describing Soleri's major concepts effectively communicates some basic and difficult information. The potential for communicating the vision of Soleri through this videotape presentation is increased by the added resource of the leader's guide.

CHAPTER V  
EVALUATION OF PROJECT



This professional project does make available an audio-visual presentation of Paolo Soleri. It does have at least some effect on those people who view it. However, the presentation of Arcosanti as an alternate lifestyle is not as forceful as I would have hoped. The project compensates for this loss by the use of the leader's guide. The leader's guide not only gives vital information on Soleri's major concept but also proposes a presentation process which is effective in igniting and facilitating discussion of Soleri's concepts and their potential as an alternate lifestyle.

The value of this project is its ability to alert people to the crises of city life, motivate people to discuss the feasibility of Soleri's alternate lifestyle as an urban reality and lead them to consider the possibility of incorporating such an alternate lifestyle into the church's vision of the future. I do not see Soleri's vision as a substitute for the church's vision. I do see his vision as one of the most promising tools at present.

This project is an accurate and effective presentation of Paolo Soleri. The report of the presentation indicates that the project does impact people at both an emotional and a behavioral level. The accuracy and effectiveness of this presentation could have been increased had the videotape included visual images which would have illustrated more fully the vision of Paolo

Soleri.

My limited experience in using these materials encourages me to think they can be useful in a broader context for generating and facilitating small group discussions. This videotape and guide will not solve the manifold problems of urban sprawl and ecological destruction or their related social problems, but I do believe that they could prompt people to think about these problems and to discuss their possible solutions. I think that they will indeed challenge the people who use them to question how the church might integrate a vision of an alternative lifestyle such as Soleri's into the church's vision of the future--a future promised by the gospels and affirmed by the epistles to the believing community.

This project has integrated my studies of theology and Christian education. I have combined critical thinking, the faith of the questing pilgrim, and the assurance of the believer. This combination is the goal of theological education. My theological reflection has been related to ministry in that it assists in the transformation of the world. Soleri has spoken of this in his book, The Bridge Between Matter and Spirit is Matter Becoming Spirit, when he describes technology as the organization of matter, craft as the harmonizing of matter and art as the transforming of matter. The goal of theological education is and should be participation in the transformation of God's world and God's

community.

In the broadest sense, both theology and Christian education could be considered arts of ministry in that they are both tools in this transformation. In this professional project I have used the tools both of theology and Christian education to organize the information about Soleri and his vision of an alternative lifestyle. I hope that this videotape and the leader's guide are harmonious with Soleri's description. My hope is that they will not sit on a shelf gathering dust. I hope that they will be used as a resource to generate small group discussion in the local church. I hope that they will be used as a curriculum resource in college and seminary classrooms. I will be humbled if this videotape and guide are effective in transforming the lives of God's people. This is not a false humility but a deep appreciation for the God who moves in the world his wonders to perform.

I once heard a sermon preached about the movement of God in our world. The pastor told us that he had been a chaplain in the Navy. At one time he was overcome by the ocean's immensity and remarked to a sailor standing nearby, "It sure is big." The sailor responded, "Yes Sir, everywhere you go, it's there." The pastor went on to say that he had not been in every ocean of the world, but that he could know the basic things about the ocean by reaching out and touching its near side. By reaching out and touching

the ocean where it brushes the shore, we can know everything we need to know about the ocean in general. I cannot know everything that God plans or has a foot in in the world. But, when I touch God's near side of love and concern in life, I know who it is that has authored it. I do not see the breadth of the church's vision of a transforming world in Soleri's vision. I do recognize the care and love he has for humanity and the horrendous problems on our horizon. I believe that his vision can be a useful tool as the church struggles with those problems. In Soleri I touch the near side of God.

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